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AN ARMOIRE OF THE
REGENCY PERIOD

IT is hard for the student and lover of French decorative art to resist the temptation to say that the ornamental woodwork of the early eighteenth century is supreme in its field. It would be difficult indeed to refute this claim in the face of the numerous superb examples of both wall treatment and furniture yet in existence in their original situation. The Museum has recently been fortunate enough to acquire a splendid specimen of the workmanship of this period, remarkable not only in its preservation, but also in its somewhat unusual form.

The oak armoire, an illustration of which accompanies this article, dates probably from the first years of the Regency (1715-1723). This is true at least in point of style, though its actual execution may have been somewhat later.

One is struck at once by the architectural character of the piece. It is more the product of an architect than of a furniture designer, and it is therefore to the interior architecture of the time that one must go for parallel and comparison. Probably no other piece of furniture has lent itself more readily to an architectural interpretation than the armoire, since really it is only one degree removed from the built-in cupboard or closet, which may even use the same name.¹ According to Havard, these two classes of armoire had already become distinct by the fifteenth century, but apparently, except for a time during the sixteenth century, when the *armoire à deux corps* developed and a smaller scale was introduced, the architectural character of the movable type was never lost. This characteristic of the armoire is particularly in evidence in our example and is brought out even more strikingly when a comparison is made with the other movable furniture of the period, which under the *ébénistes* of the previous century, and still more so under Charles Cressent, had been growing less and less architectonic in character.

This armoire, we are led to believe, was probably built to harmonize with and com-

plete the interior treatment of a particular room. No documentary evidence has been forthcoming to prove this or even to suggest a definite provenance, and so we can only imagine what its original surroundings must have been. Considered by itself alone, however, the piece is a document of the greatest interest, as it illustrates clearly the changes that were taking place in design in the early years of the eighteenth century. With the exception, perhaps, of the crowning pediment, the heaviness that characterizes similar work of the previous century has entirely disappeared, and the entire design suggests a searching after a lightness and elegance which later developed into the rocaille license of Meissonnier. The insistence on the vertical line and the suppression of the horizontal are indicative of the change, but the simplicity and firmness of the design have been so well accented that the lack of the structural quality, which begins to show only a few years later, is nowhere in evidence.

In the eyes of the purist, there may be a lack of complete accord in scale and of just relation—as between the head of the door panels and the crowning member—but these are details which the transitional nature of the piece may well explain. To doubt the hand of a master on this score, is indeed out of place when we come to examine the design and execution of the details. Apart from its brilliant execution, the central ornament of the door panels is a masterpiece of design which will rank in every way with any of the work of Germain Boffrand at the Hotel Soubise, which it somewhat resembles. Unfortunately, the monogram J. M. A. in the roundel does not give us any help in unearthing the history of the piece, as the arms on the cartouche between the scrolls of the pediment yield, as yet, no clue to its ownership.

The perfect preservation of the piece enables us to see the jewel-like perfection of the carving, as on the day it was finished. No one but a brilliant and highly trained craftsman could have done such work, and although we can not name the author, it should not be less esteemed than if we could connect it with Boffrand or De Cotte. In striking contrast to the work of the present

¹Monet. Dictionnaire.

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ARMOIRE
FRENCH, PERIOD OF THE REGENCY

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ENTERED AS SECOND-CLASS MATTER, APRIL 11, 1907, AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., UNDER THE ACT OF AUG. 24, 1912.
ACCEPTANCE FOR MAILING AT SPECIAL RATE OF POSTAGE PROVIDED FOR IN SECTION 1105, ACT OF OCT. 3, 1917, AUTHORIZED.

day and of the late eighteenth century, the ornament is carved from the solid wood; the plain surfaces being set back to obtain the necessary relief. The skill and labor that this implies is enormous, especially in view of the extreme refinement and precision of the execution. In this connection, the superb handling of the various planes in the door panels should be noted, and particularly the convex surface of the monogram field, where the slightest technical slip would have spelt disaster. This particular detail exemplifies the increasing freedom with which earlier motives were being treated in connection with such Regency motives as the banded reed molding. But this freedom is kept in perfect control by sufficient emphasis on the simple framework of the design. It is the omission of this necessary emphasis which led to the excesses of the mid-eighteenth-century design.

The old steel lock and hinges are still in place and in perfect working order, which gives additional evidence of the care and esteem with which the piece has been treated since its completion. According to the customary arrangement, the armoire is assembled in eight main parts, consisting of the two wings of the door, the two sides with the corner pilasters, the hood, including its elaborate front, the bottom, and two sections of paneling forming the back. These parts are connected by steel pins, and are easily separable, enabling the piece to be moved through narrow doorways and packed for transportation.

To realize the superb qualities of design and craftsmanship that give such express

value to the piece, a first-hand examination is necessary, and it is hoped that every student and lover of such work will avail himself of the opportunity afforded by this recent acquisition, which is now on exhibition in Gallery J 11. M. R. R.

A CRUCIFIXION BY PESELLINO

THE remarkable thing about the small Crucifixion attributed to Pesellino¹ which the Museum has bought lately is the landscape background. The figures, though dignified and impressive, can not compare with the figures in the tiny picture of the same subject by this artist which the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin bought out of an English collection several years ago. The Christ in that panel is a masterly creation and the holy people have a solidity of form and an intensity of expression that the figures in ours can not approach. Our version is more youthful in workmanship and its only advantage over the other, which has a gold background, lies in the in-



DETAIL OF ARMOIRE

terest of the landscape.

Our panel shows its author's reliance on Fra Angelico, whose work it recalls in spirit, in color, and above all in the landscape. The attribution to Pesellino is vouched for by several authorities, chief among whom is Langton Douglas, the editor of the most recent edition of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *History of Italian Painting*. Pesellino according to Wiesbach² came in direct contact with Fra Angelico,

¹Tempera on wood: H. 16½ in.; W. 11¼ in. Purchase, Marquand Fund, 1919.

²Francesco Pesellino, p. 37.